

Exploration of the Blended Learning Model in English Major Education at Private Applied Universities

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Abstract: The integration of the blended learning model in the curriculum of English majors at private applied universities is a strategic response to the evolving demands of higher education. This study explores the potential of blended learning to augment learning outcomes and the overall educational experience. By combining traditional classroom instruction with online learning tools, the model seeks to offer a more flexible and resource-rich environment that can foster student engagement and initiative, thereby promoting a well-rounded development of English language skills and cultural competencies. The research delves into the practical implementation of the blended learning model, examining how it can be tailored to meet the specific needs of English majors. It discusses the integration of technology into the curriculum, the importance of faculty training, and the creation of an interactive and personalized learning experience. The study also emphasizes the need for continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms to ensure the model's effectiveness. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of cultivating English talents with practical capabilities, innovative abilities, and an international perspective. It underscores the role of blended learning in preparing students for the global job market by providing them with the necessary language proficiency and cultural understanding.

Keywords: Private applied undergraduate; English major; Blended learning model

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1. Research background

To build a comprehensive high-quality educational development system, the state encourages and supports the operations of private colleges and universities. This approach promotes the diversified development of higher education, catering to the needs of students at different levels, across various fields, and of different types. Consequently, it enriches the connotation and expands the scope of higher education. As an essential component of China's higher education system, private colleges and universities have reached a new stage of integration and innovation. They have fully embraced the successful experiences of both domestic and international public and private institutions. The "Implementation Regulations of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Private Education" clearly stipulated how to standardize the quality of operations and plan for the future

development of private colleges ^[1].

According to data from the Ministry of Education released on March 1, 2023, there are 167,200 private schools of all types at all levels nationwide, including 789 private colleges and universities. Private applied universities, characterized by their applied, vocational, and industrial educational focus, closely align their curriculum with industry needs. This alignment enhances students' practical skills and boosts their employment competitiveness. Their primary objective is to cultivate applied and technical talents who can offer professional technology and services, thereby contributing to socioeconomic development and industrial upgrading. With the introduction of the "Education Informatization 2.0 Action Plan," learning methods characterized by the "Internet+" era, such as ubiquitous learning and real-time remote collaborative learning, are continuously emerging ^[2]. This evolution expands the teaching environment and transforms learning methods and resources. "China's Education Modernization 2035" outlines accelerating educational reform in the information age as one of the ten strategic tasks for educational reform.

2. Domestic and international research status

The exploration of the blended learning model within the realm of English major education at private applied universities has emerged as a prominent topic in educational research. This is particularly due to the ongoing advancements in information technology and the progressive nature of educational reform. The blended learning model, often referred to as "Blended Learning," is an educational approach that leverages the strengths of both traditional, face-to-face instruction and online distance education. It enables students to acquire knowledge and skills through conventional teaching methods while simultaneously gaining access to a broader array of learning resources and more interactive experiences provided by the online learning environment.

2.1. Domestic research

In recent years, researchers have delved into the blended learning model within college English major education, yielding numerous valuable insights. For example, Na *et al.* discovered that students engaged in the blended learning model experienced a remarkable improvement of over 50% in their English listening and speaking skills, whereas those taught traditionally saw only a 10% improvement ^[3]. Zhong *et al.*, in their comparative study of blended learning versus traditional teaching methods, observed that students utilizing the blended learning model enhanced their English proficiency by more than 20%, compared to a mere 5% increase for those in traditional classes ^[4].

Furthermore, the pedagogical strategies employed within the blended learning model significantly influence students' learning outcomes. In a comparative analysis of learning outcomes under various teaching strategies, Ma *et al.* determined that students who employed PBL (Problem-Based Learning) and TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching) within the blended learning framework achieved the most favorable results ^[5]. Conversely, those who adopted the PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) approach had the least successful outcomes.

2.2. International research

The blended learning model has been extensively researched and adopted in higher education institutions worldwide. In the United States, this model predominantly integrates online learning with in-person instruction, empowering students to autonomously select learning methods to achieve personalized and self-directed education. This is largely facilitated by technological advancements, including online platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital textbooks, which diversify content and enhance teaching flexibility. Australia is

recognized as a leader in blended learning, emphasizing a fusion of online and traditional in-person teaching. Distinct from the United States approach, the Australian model places a greater focus on fostering students' self-directed and interactive learning experiences ^[6].

Online platforms enable students to engage in learning at their convenience, while also promoting interaction with educators and peers to bolster academic performance and engagement. Canada's approach to blended learning is characterized by its diversity, utilizing a range of media such as videos, comics, and games to enrich educational content, thereby making the learning process more dynamic and engaging. In the United Kingdom, the blended learning model is also prevalent, combining online and face-to-face instruction through online platforms and a suite of educational technologies, which encourages students to actively explore and engage in the learning process.

3. Issues in the teaching model of English majors at private universities

Private applied universities constitute a significant element of China's higher education framework. Nevertheless, the implementation of traditional blended learning models encounters several challenges and issues:

- (1) Teaching design issues: The challenge lies in crafting a curriculum that aligns with blended learning objectives and caters to student needs. This includes making informed decisions regarding the content, format, and pacing of each phase within the blended learning process.
- (2) Teaching model integration: There is a need to harmoniously blend traditional teaching methods with blended learning approaches to leverage their combined strengths. This effort aims to prevent an over-reliance on electronic technology and to enhance the overall effectiveness of teaching.
- (3) Teaching resource utilization: It is crucial to maximize the use of various teaching resources essential for blended learning. This includes digital materials, online platforms, and self-study tools, ensuring rich and varied educational content.
- (4) Teaching management issues: Establishing a robust system of teaching management policies is essential to oversee the seamless execution of the teaching process and to maintain the quality of student learning experiences within a blended environment.
- (5) Teacher training and support: There is a necessity to equip educators with the skills to effectively navigate the blended learning model. This involves enhancing their proficiency in information technology and fostering their innovative capabilities to boost teaching quality.
- (6) Teaching evaluation issues: Developing a rigorous evaluation framework for blended learning is imperative. This system should provide a comprehensive assessment of the teaching process, outcomes, and quality, offering insights to guide the continuous refinement of blended learning practices ^[7].

4. Cultivating innovative talents in English majors at private applied universities

As society progresses and the role of English in international communication becomes ever more significant, traditional English teaching models are confronted with several challenges. These include low student engagement, inadequate pedagogical efficacy, and the use of overly abstract content that does not adequately address the needs of learners. Consequently, there is an urgent need to investigate and adopt more effective instructional approaches. This paper addresses the existing issues in current research on English major teaching models by delving into the following areas of inquiry.

4.1. Theoretical research on blended learning models

As information technology advances rapidly, there is a corresponding increase in students' demand for a variety of learning methods and instructional tools. The blended learning model encapsulates the strengths of both traditional and online teaching, catering to diverse student learning needs and enhancing both the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning process. Secondly, the blended learning model enhances the utilization of educational resources. Traditional face-to-face teaching is often constrained by limitations in time, space, and faculty availability, which can hinder the full exploitation of teaching resources.

In contrast, the blended learning model leverages technological tools, such as online teaching platforms, to digitize teaching materials. This facilitates the sharing and interaction of teaching resources across both online and offline environments, thereby boosting the efficiency and efficacy of teaching. Furthermore, the blended learning model also fosters the professional development of educators. Teachers can utilize online platforms and other technological resources to continuously refine their instructional methods and skills. This ongoing enhancement leads to a higher quality and more impactful teaching experience.

4.2. Research on teaching design of blended learning models

Teaching design is central to the effectiveness of the blended learning model. When designing a blended learning curriculum, it is imperative to establish clear educational goals, delineate the knowledge and skills students should acquire, and predict the learning outcomes. It is equally important to consider the diverse needs and abilities of students to create customized teaching plans. Below are descriptions of several widely adopted blended learning models:

- (1) Flipped classroom model: This approach requires students to review and engage with course material through an online platform before class. Class time is then dedicated to interactive discussions, collaborative problem-solving, and in-depth exploration under the guidance of the teacher.
- (2) Inverted classroom model: In this model, teachers offer direct instruction and support during class sessions, while students undertake homework assignments and self-directed learning activities on an online platform post-class, allowing for a more personalized learning pace.
- (3) Blended online learning model: By combining the structure of traditional in-person teaching with the flexibility of online learning, this model allows students to study course material at their convenience via an online platform. This flexibility is complemented by focused class sessions for discussions and exploration, enhancing the depth of understanding.
- (4) Station rotation model: In this model, students are organized into groups that sequentially rotate through different learning stations. At each station, they engage in a variety of activities, such as direct instruction, peer collaboration, and online learning, fostering a multifaceted educational experience.
- (5) Hybrid course model: This model effectively merges face-to-face teaching with online learning components. A portion of the course content is delivered online, often asynchronously, allowing students to learn at their own pace, while the remaining content is taught in a traditional classroom setting, promoting direct interaction and immediate feedback.

4.3. Research on teaching strategies of blended learning models

Teaching strategies are pivotal to the success of the blended learning model and significantly influence students' learning outcomes. Both domestic and international researchers have extensively explored strategies within the realms of classroom instruction, online learning, and self-directed study, proposing several viable

approaches. When devising strategies for the blended learning model, the following factors must be taken into account:

- (1) Teaching resources and technical support: The model necessitates that students have unrestricted access to online learning resources at all times and places. It also requires the provision of user-friendly educational technology tools to facilitate the seamless operation of the blended learning environment.
- (2) Students' learning habits and motivation: The blended learning model presupposes a degree of self-directed learning capability among students. It is essential to foster students' self-learning habits and motivation, enabling them to engage in the learning process proactively, actively seek knowledge, and consequently enhance their learning outcomes.
- (3) Teaching management and supervision: Effective management and oversight are crucial for the blended learning model. Educational institutions should establish robust teaching management systems to monitor the quality of instruction and learning achievements. They must also foster close interaction with students to promptly address any issues or challenges they encounter.

4.4. Research on teaching evaluation of blended learning models

Teaching evaluation is a fundamental component of the blended learning model, critically important for enhancing students' learning outcomes and elevating the quality of instruction. Researchers globally have delved into the intricacies of teaching evaluation, which encompasses assessing students' learning achievements and the effectiveness of teachers' instructional methods. They have proposed several effective evaluation techniques, including assessments aligned with learning objectives and reflective assessments that encourage introspection and self-analysis.

To thoroughly assess the blended learning model, a multidimensional approach is necessary, considering the following aspects:

- (1) Student learning outcomes: These are paramount in evaluating the success of the blended learning model. It is essential to evaluate the breadth of knowledge acquired, the proficiency in skills, the level of motivation, and the attitudes toward learning that students exhibit throughout the educational process.
- (2) Teacher teaching quality: The pedagogical methods and strategies employed, the comprehensiveness of the teaching content and resources, and the efficacy of teaching management and oversight are all crucial factors in assessing the quality of instruction.
- (3) Teaching resources and technical support: These are pivotal to the seamless operation of the blended learning model. The resources include digital textbooks, online courses, interactive exercises, video tutorials, and virtual labs. Technical support encompasses the infrastructure of network equipment, electronic devices, multimedia tools, and software applications. These elements are instrumental in facilitating the educational activities of both educators and learners.

Table 1 shows designing the blended learning model based on the "dual-subject" concept, combining the issues existing in the blended learning model at private applied universities, and integrating the above four dimensions. It summarizes the various stages of teacher and student behavior in the teaching process ^[8].

Table 1. The leading role of teachers and the main role of students in blended learning

Blended learning model dimensions	Teacher behavior			Student behavior		
	Course preparation	Entire teaching		Function	Online	Offline
		Online	Offline			
Teaching theory research	Object analysis	Problem feedback	Key knowledge	Supervision	Autonomous learning	Listening to lectures
Teaching design research	Goal analysis	Supervision & guidance	Difficult issues	Evaluation	Discovering issues	Participating in discussion
Teaching strategy research	Implementation pathways	Answering questions and resolving doubts	Common issues	Reflection	Discussion and consultation	Critical reflection
Teaching evaluation research	Resource determination	Correcting homework	Exam and assessment	Optimization	Completing homework	Review and summary

It is also important to consider the following:

- (1) Continuous improvement: The evaluation process should not be static but rather iterative, with feedback loops that inform ongoing enhancements to teaching strategies and learning experiences.
- (2) Student and teacher involvement: Active participation of both students and teachers in the evaluation process can provide valuable perspectives and insights, leading to more relevant and effective educational strategies.
- (3) Data-driven decisions: Utilizing data collected from various assessments to make informed decisions about curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and resource allocation.

As shown in **Figure 1**^[9], the design of the blended learning model needs to consider various aspects such as the teaching model, objectives, teaching content and resources, teaching methods and strategies, and teaching evaluation. Only with a reasonable combination and effective integration of each aspect can the best teaching outcomes be achieved. The blended learning model breaks the spatial and temporal boundaries of teacher instruction and student learning, further stimulating students' initiative in learning. It promotes the implementation of "autonomous, cooperative, and exploratory" learning methods during the teaching process, which is conducive to improving the quality of talent cultivation and achieving the teaching effectiveness of "1 + 1 > 2."

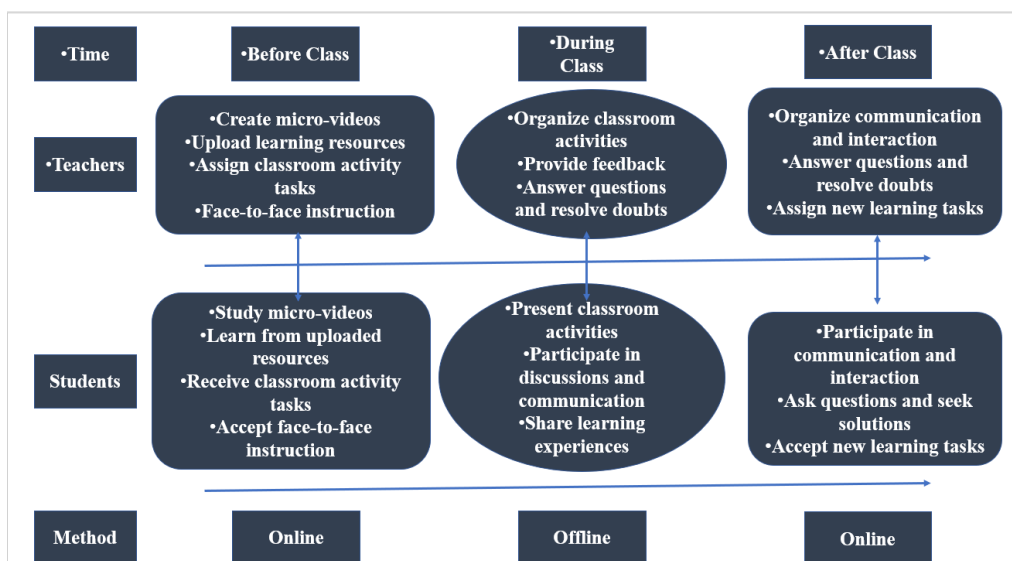


Figure 1. Blended learning model: Online and offline teaching process

5. Conclusion

The primary objective of this research is to develop a blended learning model that aligns with the educational framework of English majors at private applied universities. The study aims to significantly enhance students' proficiency in the essential language skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating—as well as to strengthen their cross-cultural communication competencies. Additionally, it seeks to foster their practical application skills and innovative thinking. The specific aims of the study are outlined as follows:

- (1) To identify a blended learning model that is well-suited to the pedagogical context of English majors at private applied universities.
- (2) To design and develop an online learning platform and a comprehensive set of teaching resources that correspond with the blended learning model. These resources will address key areas, including English listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary enhancement, and cultural knowledge.
- (3) To organize professional development opportunities, such as training sessions and seminars, to elevate teachers' understanding and application of the blended learning model. This support will empower teachers to effectively and flexibly integrate the model into their teaching practices, with the goal of improving teaching efficacy and student satisfaction.
- (4) To iteratively refine the blended learning model through the implementation of experimental courses and by gathering insightful feedback from teaching experiences. This continuous optimization process is designed to progressively improve students' overall English proficiency and their cross-cultural communication capabilities.

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